

Underwoods (1887) COLLECTION OF POEMS

ROBERT LOUIS
STEVENSON

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UNDERWOODS

BY

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Rew Pork
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1887

规则V. OF

CALIFORNIA

DEDICATION

There are men and classes of men that stand above the common herd: the soldier, the sailor, and the shepherd not unfrequently; the artist rarely; rarelier still, the clergyman; the physician almost as a rule. He is the flower (such as it is) of our civilisation; and when that stage of man is done with, and only remembered to be marvelled at in history, he will be thought to have shared as little as any in the defects of the period, and most notably exhibited the virtues of the race. Generosity he has, such as is possible to those who practise an art, never to those who drive a trade; discretion, tested by a hundred secrets; tact, tried in a thousand embarrassments; and what are more important, Heraclean cheerfulness and courage. So it is that

he brings air and cheer into the sick-room, and often enough, though not so often as he wishes, brings healing.

Gratitude is but a lame sentiment; thanks, when they are expressed, are often more embarrassing than welcome; and yet I must set forth mine to a few out of many doctors who have brought me comfort and help: to Dr. Willey of San Francisco, whose kindness to a stranger it must be as grateful to him, as it is touching to me, to remember; to Dr. Karl Ruedi of Davos, the good genius of the English in his frosty mountains; to Dr. Herbert of Paris, whom I knew only for a week, and to Dr. Caissot of Montpellier, whom I knew only for ten days, and who have yet written their names deeply in my memory; to Dr. Brandt of Royat; to Dr. Wakefield of Nice; to Dr. Chepmell, whose visits make it a pleasure to be ill; to Dr. Horace Dobell, so wise in counsel; to Sir Andrew Clark, so unwearied in kindness; and to that wise youth, my uncle, Dr. Balfour.

I forget as many as I remember; and I ask both to pardon me, these for silence, those for inadequate speech. But one name I have kept on purpose to the

last, because it is a household word with me, and because if I had not received favours from so many hands and in so many quarters of the world, it should have stood upon this page alone: that of my friend Thomas Bodley Scott of Bournemouth. Will he accept this, although shared among so many, for a dedication to himself? and when next my ill-fortune (which has thus its pleasant side) brings him hurrying to me when he would fain sit down to meat or lie down to rest, will he care to remember that he takes this trouble for one who is not fool enough to be ungrateful?

R. L. S. Skerryvore,

Bournemouth.

NOTE

The human conscience has fled of late the troublesome domain of conduct for what I should have supposed to be the less congenial field of art: there she may now be said to rage, and with special severity in all that touches dialect; so that in every novel the letters of the alphabet are tortured, and the reader wearied, to commemorate shades of mispronunciation. Now spelling is an art of great difficulty in my eyes, and I am inclined to lean upon the printer, even in common practice, rather than to venture abroad upon new quests. And the Scots tongue has an orthography of its own, lacking neither " authority nor author." Yet the temptation is great to

lend a little guidance to. the bewildered Englishman. Some simple phonetic artifice might defend your verses from barbarous mishandling, and yet not injure any

vested interest. So it seems at first; but there are rocks ahead. Thus, if I wish the diphthong ou to have its proper value, I may write oor instead of our / many-have done so and lived, and the pillars of the universe remained unshaken. But if I did so, and came presently to doun, which is the classical Scots spelling of the English down, I should begin to feel uneasy; and if I went on a little farther, and came to a classical Scots word, like stour or dour or clour, I should know precisely where I was — that is to say, that I was out of sight of land on those high seas of spelling reform in which so many strong swimmers have toiled vainly. To some the situation is exhilarating; as for me, I give one bubbling cry and sink. The compromise at which I have arrived is indefensible, and I have no thought of trying to defend it. As I have stuck for the most part to the proper spelling, I append a table of some common vowel sounds which no one need consult; and just to prove that I belong to my age and have in me the stuff of a reformer, I have used modification marks throughout. Thus I can tell myself, not without pride, that I

have added a fresh stumbling-block for English readers, and to a page of print in my native tongue, have lent a new uncouthness. Sed non nobis.

I note again, that among our new dialecticians, the local habitat of every dialect is given to the square mile. I could not emulate this nicety if I desired; for I simply wrote my Scots as well as I was able, not caring if it hailed from Lauderdale or Angus, from the Mearns or Galloway; if I had ever heard a good word, I used it without shame; and when Scots was lacking, or the rhyme jibbed, I was glad (like my betters) to fall back on English. For all that, I own to a friendly feeling for the tongue of Fergusson and of Sir Walter, both Edinburgh men; and I confess that Burns has always sounded in my ear like something partly foreign. And indeed I am from the Lothians myself; it is there I heard the language spoken about my childhood; and it is in the drawling Lothian voice that I repeat it to myself. Let the precisians call my speech that of the Lothians. And if it be not pure, alas! what matters it? The day draws near when this illustrious and

malleable tongue shall be quite forgotten; and Burns's Ayrshire, and Dr. Macdonald's Aberdeen-awa', and Scott's brave, metropolitan utterance will be all equally the ghosts of speech. Till then I would love to have my hour as a native Maker, and be read by my own countryfolk in our own dying language: an ambition surely rather of the heart than of the head, so restricted as it is in prospect of endurance, so parochial in bounds of space.

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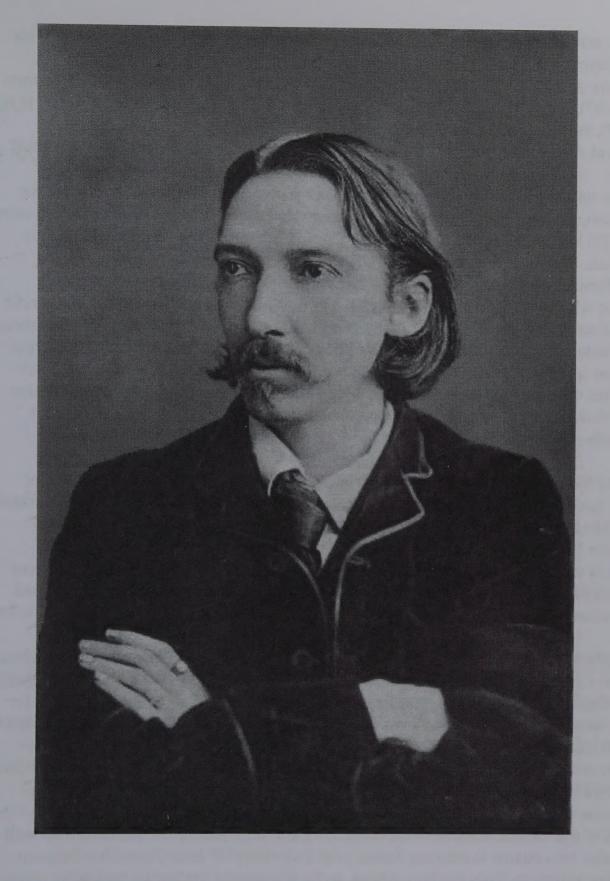
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Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson (13 November 1850 – 3 December 1894) was a Scottish novelist, poet, essayist, and travel writer. His most famous works are Treasure Island, Kidnapped, Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, and A Child's Garden of Verses.

A literary celebrity during his lifetime, Stevenson now ranks as the 26th most translated author in the world. His works have been admired by many other writers, including Jorge Luis Borges, Bertolt Brecht, Marcel Proust, Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry James, Cesare Pavese, Emilio Salgari, Ernest Hemingway, Rudyard Kipling, Jack London, Vladimir Nabokov, J. M. Barrie, and

G. K. Chesterton, who said of him that he "seemed to pick the right word up on the point of his pen, like a man playing spillikins"

Stevenson was born at 8 Howard Place, Edinburgh, Scotland, on 13 November 1850, to Thomas Stevenson (1818–87), a leading lighthouse engineer, and his wife Margaret Isabella (born Balfour; 1829–97). He was christened Robert Lewis Balfour Stevenson. At about age 18, Stevenson was to change the spelling of "Lewis" to "Louis", and in 1873, he dropped "Balfour".

Lighthouse design was the family's profession: Thomas's father (Robert's grandfather) was the famous Robert Stevenson, and both of Thomas's brothers (Robert's uncles) Alan and David, were in the same field.[9] Indeed, even Thomas's maternal grandfather, Thomas Smith, had been in the same profession. However, Robert's mother's family were not of the same profession. Margaret's natal family, the Balfours, were gentry, tracing their lineage back to a certain Alexander Balfour who had held the lands of Inchyra in Fife in the fifteenth century. Margaret's father, Lewis Balfour (1777–1860), was a minister of the Church of Scotland at nearby Colinton, and her siblings included the physician George William Balfour and the marine engineer James Balfour. Stevenson spent the greater part of his boyhood holidays in his maternal grandfather's house. "Now I often wonder," wrote Stevenson, "what I inherited from this old minister. I must suppose, indeed, that he was fond of preaching sermons, and so am I, though I never heard it maintained that either of us loved to hear them."

Lewis Balfour and his daughter both had weak chests, so they often needed to stay in warmer climates for their health. Stevenson inherited a tendency to coughs and fevers, exacerbated when the family moved to a damp, chilly house at 1 Inverleith Terrace in 1851. The family moved again to the sunnier 17 Heriot Row when Stevenson was six years old, but the tendency to extreme sickness in winter remained with him until he was eleven. Illness would be a recurrent feature of his adult life and left him extraordinarily thin. Contemporary views were that he had tuberculosis, but more recent views are that it was bronchiectasis or even sarcoidosis.

Stevenson's parents were both devout and serious Presbyterians, but the household was not strict in its adherence to Calvinist principles. His nurse, Alison Cunningham (known as Cummy), was more fervently religious. Her Calvinism and folk beliefs were an early source of nightmares for the child, and he showed a precocious concern for religion. But she also cared for him tenderly in illness, reading to him from Bunyan and the Bible as he lay sick in bed and telling tales of the Covenanters. Stevenson recalled this time of sickness in "The Land of Counterpane" in A Child's Garden of Verses (1885), dedicating the book to his nurse. An only child, strange-looking and eccentric, Stevenson found it hard to fit in when he was sent to a nearby school at age six, a problem repeated at age eleven when he went on to the Edinburgh Academy; but he mixed well in lively games with his cousins in summer holidays at Colinton.[20] In any case, his frequent illnesses often kept him away from his first school, so he was taught for long stretches by private tutors. He was a late reader, first learning at age seven or eight, but even before this he dictated stories to his mother and nurse. He compulsively wrote stories throughout his childhood. His father was proud of this interest; he had also written stories in his spare time until his own father found them and told him to "give up such nonsense and mind your business." He paid for the printing of Robert's first publication at sixteen, an account of the Covenanters' rebellion, which was published on its two hundredth anniversary, The Pentland Rising: A Page of History, 1666 (1866).

BOOK I.—In English

ENVOY

Go, little book, and wish to all

Flowers in the garden, meat in the hall,

A bin of wine, a spice of wit,

A house with lawns enclosing it,

A living river by the door,

A nightingale in the sycamore!

A SONG OF THE ROAD

The gauger walked with willing foot, And aye the gauger played the flute; And what should Master Gauger play But Over the hills and far away?

Whene'er I buckle on my pack And foot it gaily in the track,

0 pleasant gauger, long since dead,

1 hear you fluting on ahead.

You go with me the self-same way — The self-same air for me you play; For I do think and so do you It is the tune to travel to.

A SONG OF THE ROAD

For who would gravely set his face To go to this or t'other place? There's nothing under Heav'n so blue That's fairly worth the travelling to.

On every hand the roads begin, And people walk with zeal therein; But wheresoe'er the highways tend, Be sure there's nothing at the end.

Then follow you, wherever hie The travelling mountains of the sky. Or let the streams in civil mode Direct your choice upon a road;

For one and all, or high or low, Will lead you where you wish to go; And one and all go night and day Over the hills and far away /

THE CANOE SPEAKS

On the great streams the ships may go

About men's business too and fro.

But I, the egg-shell pinnace, sleep

On crystal waters ankle-deep:

I, whose diminutive design,

Of sweeter cedar, pithier pine,

Is fashioned on so frail a mould,

A hand may launch, a hand withhold:

I, rather, with the leaping trout

Wind, among lilies, in and out;

I, the unnamed, inviolate, Green, rustic rivers, navigate; My dipping paddle scarcely shakes THE CANOE SPEAKS

The berry in the bramble-brakes; Still forth on my green way I wend Beside the cottage garden-end; And by the nested angler fare, And take the lovers unaware. By willow wood and water-wheel Speedily fleets my touching keel; By all retired and shady spots Where prosper dim forget-me-nots; By meadows where at afternoon The growing maidens troop in June To loose their girdles on the grass. Ah! speedier than before the glass The backward toilet goes; and swift As swallows quiver, robe and shift And the rough country stockings lie Around each young divinity. When, following the recondite brook, Sudden upon this scene I look,

UNDERWOODS

And light with unfamiliar face On chaste Diana's bathing-place, Loud ring the hills about and all The shallows are abandoned. . .

It is the season now to go About the country high and low, Among the lilacs hand in hand, And two by two in fairy land.

The brooding boy, the sighing maid, Wholly fain and half afraid, Now meet along the hazel'd brook To pass and linger, pause and look.

A year ago, and blithely paired, Their rough-and-tumble play they shared; They kissed and quarrelled, laughed and cried, A year ago at Eastertide.

UNDERWOODS

With bursting heart, with fiery face,

She strove against him in the race;

He unabashed her garter saw,

That now would touch her skirts with awe.

Now by the stile ablaze she stops, And his demurer eyes he drops; Now they exchange averted sighs Or stand and marry silent eyes.

And he to her a hero is And sweeter she than primroses; Their common silence dearer far Than nightingale and mavis are.

Now when they sever wedded hands, Joy trembles in their bosom-strands, And lovely laughter leaps and falls Upon their lips in madrigals.

V THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

A naked house, a naked moor, A shivering pool before the door, A garden bare of flowers and fruit And poplars at the garden foot: Such is the place that I live in, Bleak without and bare within.

Yet shall your ragged moor receive The incomparable pomp of eve, And the cold glories of the dawn Behind your shivering trees be drawn; And when the wind from place to place

Doth the unmoored cloud-galleons chase, Your garden gloom and gleam again, With leaping sun, with glancing rain. Here shall the wizard moon ascend The heavens, in the crimson end Of day's declining splendour; here The army of the stars appear. The neighbour hollows dry or wet, Spring shall with tender flowers beset; And oft the morning muser see Larks rising from the broomy lea, And every fairy wheel and thread Of cobweb dew-bediamonded. When daisies go, shall winter time Silver the simple grass with rime j Autumnal frosts enchant the pool And make the cart-ruts beautiful; And when snow-bright the moor expands, How shall your children clap their hands!

THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL u

To make this earth, our hermitage, A cheerful and a changeful page, God's bright and intricate device Of days and seasons doth suffice.

VI A VISIT FROM THE SEA

Far from the loud sea beaches Where he goes fishing and crying,

Here in the inland garden Why is the sea-gull flying?

Here are no fish to dive for;

Here is the corn and lea; Here are the green trees rustling.

Hie away home to sea!

Fresh is the river water

And quiet among the rushes;

A VISIT FROM THE SEA.

This is no home for the sea-gull But for the rooks and thrushes.

Pity the bird that has wandered!

Pity the sailor ashore! Hurry him home to the ocean,

Let him come here no more!

High on the sea-cliff ledges

The white gulls are trooping and crying, Here among rooks and roses,

Why is the sea-gull flying?.

VII TO A GARDENER

Friend, in my mountain-side demesne, My plain-beholding, rosy, green And linnet-haunted garden-ground, Let still the esculents abound. Let first the onion flourish there, Rose among roots, the maiden-fair, Wine-scented and poetic soul Of the capacious salad bowl. Let thyme the mountaineer (to dress The tinier birds) and wading cress, The lover of the shallow brook, From all my plots and borders look.

TO A GARDENER

Nor crisp and ruddy radish, nor Pease-cods for the child's pinafore Be lacking; nor of salad clan The last and least that ever ran About great nature's garden-beds. Nor thence be missed the speary heads Of artichoke; nor thence the bean That gathered innocent and green Outsavours the belauded pea.

These tend, I prithee; and for me, Thy most long-surTering master, bring In April, when the linnets sing And the days lengthen more and more, At sundown to the garden door. And I, being provided thus, Shall, with superb asparagus, A book, a taper, and a cup Of country wine, divinely sup. La Solitude, Hyeres.

TO MINNIE

(With a hand-glass) A PICTURE-FRAME for yOU tO fill,

A paltry setting for your face, A thing that has no worth until

You lend it something of your grace,

I send (unhappy I that sing

Laid by awhile upon the shelf)

Because I would not send a thing

Less charming than you are yourself.

And happier than I, alas!

(Dumb thing, I envy its delight) 'Twill wish you well, the looking-glass,

And look you in the face to-night.

1869.

TO K. de M.

A lover of the moorland bare

And honest country winds, you were;

The silver-skimming rain you took;

And loved the floodings of the brook,

Dew, frost and mountains, fire and seas,

Tumultuary silences,

Winds that in darkness fifed a tune,

And the high-riding, virgin moon.

And as the berry, pale and sharp, Springs on some ditch's counterscarp In our ungenial, native north — You put your frosted wildings forth,

And on the heath, afar from man, A strong and bitter virgin ran.

The berry ripened keeps the rude And racy flavour of the wood. And you that loved the empty plain All redolent of wind and rain, Around you still the curlew sings — The freshness of the weather clings -The maiden jewels of the rain Sit in your dabbled locks again.

TO N. V. de G. S.

The unfathomable sea, and time, and tears, The deeds of heroes and the crimes of kings Dispart us; and the river of events Has, for an age of years, to east and west More widely borne our cradles. Thou to me Art foreign, as when seamen at the dawn Descry a land far off and know not which. So I approach uncertain; so I cruise Round thy mysterious islet, and behold Surf and great mountains and loud river-bars, And from the shore hear inland voices call.

Strange is the seaman's heart; he hopes, he fears; Draws closer and sweeps wider from that coast; Last, his rent sail refits, and to the deep His shattered prow uncomforted puts back. Yet as he goes he ponders at the helm Of that bright island; where he feared to touch, His spirit readventures; and for years, Where by his wife he slumbers safe at home, Thoughts of that land revisit him; he sees The eternal mountains beckon, and awakes Yearning for that far home that might have been.

XI TO WILL. H. LOW

Youth now flees on feathered foot, Faint and fainter sounds the flute, Rarer songs of gods; and still Somewhere on the sunny hill, Or along the winding stream, Through the willows, flits a dream; Flits but shows a smiling face, Flees but with so quaint a grace, None can choose to stay at home, All must follow, all must roam.

This is unborn beauty: she Now in air floats high and free, Takes the sun and breaks the blue; -Late with stooping pinion flew Raking hedgerow trees, and wet Her wing in silver streams, and set Shining foot on temple roof: Now again she flies aloof, Coasting mountain clouds and kiss't By the evening's amethyst.

In wet wood and miry lane, Still we pant and pound in vain; Still with leaden foot we chase Waning pinion, fainting face; Still with gray hair we stumble on, Till, behold, the vision gone!

Where hath fleeting beauty led? To the doorway of the dead. Life is over, life was gay: We have come the primrose way.

XII TO MRS. WILL. H. LOW

Even in the bluest noonday of July,
There could not run the smallest breath of wind
But all the quarter sounded like a wood;
And in the chequered silence and above
The hum of city cabs that sought the Bois,

Suburban ashes shivered into song.

A patter and a chirp

And a long dying hiss — it was as though

Starched old brocaded dames through all the house

Had trailed a strident skirt, or the whole sky

Even in a wink had over-brimmed in rain.

Hark, in these shady parlours, how it talks

Of the near Autumn, how the smitten ash

Trembles and augurs floods! O not too long

In these inconstant latitudes delay,

O not too late from the unbeloved north

Trim your escape! For soon shall this low roof

Resound indeed with rain, soon shall your eyes

Search the foul garden, search the darkened rooms,

Nor find one jewel but the blazing log.

12 Rue Vernier, Paris.

XIII TO H. F. BROWN

(Written during a dangerous sickness.)

I sit and wait a pair of oars On cis-Elysian river-shores. Where the immortal dead have sate, 'Tis mine to sit and meditate; To re-ascend life's rivulet, Without remorse, without regret; And sing my Alma Genetrix Among the willows of the Styx.

And lo, as my serener soul

Did these unhappy shores patrol,

And wait with an attentive ear The coming of the gondolier, Your fire-surviving roll I took, Your spirited and happy book; x Whereon, despite my frowning fate, It did my soul so recreate That all my fancies fled away On a Venetian holiday.

Now, thanks to your triumphant care,

Your pages clear as April air,

The sails, the bells, the birds, I know,

And the far-off Friulan snow;

The land and sea, the sun and shade,

And the blue even lamp-inlaid.

For this, for these, for all, O friend,

For your whole book from end to end —

1 Life on the Lagoons, by H. F. Brown, originally burned in the fire at Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench, and Co.'s.

For Paron Piero's muttonham — I your defaulting debtor am.

Perchance, reviving, yet may I To your sea-paven city hie, And in &felze, some day yet Light at your pipe my cigarette.

XIV TO ANDREW LANG

Dear Andrew, with the brindled hair, Who glory to have thrown in air, High over arm, the trembling reed, By Ale and Kail, by Till and Tweed: An equal craft of hand you show The pen to guide, the fly to throw: I count you happy starred; for God, When He with inkpot and with rod Endowed you, bade your fortune lead Forever by the crooks of Tweed, Forever by the woods of song And lands that to the Muse belong; Or if in peopled streets, or in The abhorred pedantic sanhedrim,

It should be yours to wander, still Airs of the morn, airs of the hill, The plovery Forest and the seas That break about the Hebrides, Should follow over field and plain And find you at the window pane; And you again see hill and peel, And the bright springs gush at your heel. So went the fiat forth, and so Garrulous like a brook you go, With sound of happy mirth and sheen Of daylight — whether by the green You fare that moment, or the gray; Whether you dwell in March or May; Or whether treat of reels and rods Or of the old unhappy gods: Still like a brook your page has shone, And your ink sings of Helicon.

ET TU IN ARCADIA VIXISTI (TO R. A. M. S.)

In ancient tales, O friend, thy spirit dwelt; There, from of old, thy childhood passed; and there High expectation, high delights and deeds, Thy fluttering heart with hope and terror moved. And thou hast heard of yore the Blatant Beast, And Roland's horn, and that war-scattering shout Of all-unarmed Achilles, aegis-crowned. And perilous lands thou sawest, sounding shores And seas and forests drear, island and dale And mountain dark. For thou with Tristram rod'st Or Bedevere, in farthest Lyonesse. Thou hadst a booth in Samarcand, whereat Side-looking Magians trafficked; thence, by night, An Afreet snatched thee, and with wings upbore Beyond the Aral mount; or, hoping gain, Thou, with a jar of money, didst embark, For Balsorah, by sea. But chiefly thou In that clear air took'st life; in Arcady The haunted, land of song; and by the wells Where most the gods frequent. There Chiron old, In the Pelethronian antre, taught thee lore The plants, he taught, and by the shining stars In forests dim to steer. There hast thou seen Immortal Pan dance secret in a glade, And, dancing, roll his eyes; these, where they fell, Shed glee, and through the congregated oaks A flying horror winged; while all the earth To the god's pregnant footing thrilled within. Or whiles, beside the sobbing stream, he breathed. In his clutched pipe, unformed and wizard strains.

Divine yet brutal: which the forest heard, And thou, with awe; and far upon the plain The unthinking ploughman started and gave ear.

Now things there are that, upon him who sees, A strong vocation lay; and strains there are That whose hears shall hear for evermore. For evermore thou hear'st immortal Pan And those melodious godheads, ever young And ever quiring, on the mountains old.

What was this earth, child of the gods, to thee?
Forth from thy dreamland thou, a dreamer, cam'st,

And in thine ears the olden music rang, And in thy mind the doings of the dead, And those heroic ages long forgot. To a so fallen earth, alas! too late, Alas! in evil days, thy steps return, To list at noon for nightingales, to grow

A dweller on the beach till Argo come That came long since, a lingerer by the pool Where that desired angel bathes no more.

As when the Indian to Dakota comes, Or farthest Idaho, and where he dwelt, He with his clan, a humming city finds; Thereon awhile, amazed, he stares, and then To right and leftward, like a questing dog, Seeks first the ancestral altars, then the hearth Long cold with rains, and where old terror lodged, And where the dead. So thee undying Hope, With all her pack, hunts screaming through the years Here, there, thou fleeest; but nor here nor there The pleasant gods abide, the glory dwells.

That, that was not Apollo, not the god.
This was not Venus, though she Venus seemed
A moment. And though fair yon river move,
She, all the way, from disenchanted fount
To seas unhallowed runs; the gods forsook
Long since her trembling rushes; from her plains
Disconsolate, long since adventure fled;
And now although the inviting river flows,
And every poplared cape, and every bend
Or willowy islet, win upon thy soul
And to thy hopeful shallop whisper speed;
Yet hope not thou at all; hope is no more;
And O, long since the golden groves are dead,
The faery cities vanished from the land!
XVI TO W. E. HENLEY

The year runs through her phases; rain and sun, Springtime and summer pass; winter succeeds; But one pale season rules the house of death. Cold falls the imprisoned daylight; fell disease By each lean pallet squats, and pain and sleep Toss gaping on the pillows.

But O thou! Uprise and take thy pipe. Bid music flow, Strains by good thoughts attended, like the spring The swallows follow over land and sea. Pain sleeps at once; at once, with open eyes, Dozing despair awakes. The shepherd sees

His flock come bleating home; the seaman hears Once more the cordage rattle. Airs of home! Youth, love and roses blossom j the gaunt ward Dislimns and disappears, and, opening out, Shows brooks and forests, and the blue beyond Of mountains.

Small the pipe; but O! do thou, Peak-faced and suffering piper, blow therein The dirge of heroes dead; and to these sick, These dying, sound the triumph over death. Behold! each greatly breathes; each tastes a joy Unknown before, in dying; for each knows A hero dies with him—though unfulfilled, Yet conquering truly—and not dies in vain.

So is pain cheered, death comforted; the house Of sorrow smiles to listen. Once again — O thou, Orpheus and Heracles, the bard And the deliverer, touch the stops again!

>>

Who comes to-night? We ope the doors in vain.

Who comes? My bursting walls, can you contain

The presences that now together throng

Your narrow entry, as with flowers and song,

As with the air of life, the breath of talk?

Lo, how these fair immaculate women walk

Behind their jocund maker; and we see

Slighted De Mauves, and that far different she,

Gressie, the trivial sphynx j and to our feast

Daisy and Barb and Chancellor (she not least!)

With all their silken, all their airy kin,

Do like unbidden angels enter in.

But he, attended by these shining names,

Comes (best of all) himself—our welcome James.

XVIII THE MIRROR SPEAKS

Where the bells peal far at sea

Cunning fingers fashioned me.

There on palace walls I hung

While that Consuelo sung;

But I heard, though I listened well,

Never a note, never a trill,

Never a beat of the chiming bell.

There I hung and looked, and there

In my gray face, faces fair

Shone from under shining hair.

Well I saw the poising head,

But the lips moved and nothing said;

UNDERWOODS

And when lights were in the hall, Silent moved the dancers all.

So awhile I glowed, and then Fell on dusty days and men; Long I slumbered packed in straw, Long I none but dealers saw; Till before my silent eye One that sees came passing by.

Now with an outlandish grace, To the sparkling fire I face In the blue room at Skerryvore; Where I wait until the door Open, and the Prince of Men, Henry James, shall come again.

XIX KATHARINE

We see you as we see a face That trembles in a forest place Upon the mirrror of a pool Forever quiet, clear and cool; And in the wayward glass, appears To hover between smiles and tears, Elfin and human, airy and true, And backed by the reflected blue.

TO F. J. S.

I read, dear friend, in your dear face Your life's tale told with perfect grace; The river of your life, I trace Up the sun-chequered, devious bed To the far-distant fountain-head.

Not one quick beat of your warm heart, Nor thought that came to you apart, Pleasure nor pity, love nor pain Nor sorrow, has gone by in vain;

But as some lone, wood-wandering child Brings home with him at evening mild The thorns and flowers of all the wild, From your whole life, O fair and true Your flowers and thorns you bring with you!

XXI REQUIEM

Under the wide and starry sky, Dig the grave and let me lie. Glad did I live and gladly die, And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me: Here he lies where he lo7iged to be; Home is the sailor, home from sea, And the hunter home from the hill.

XXII THE CELESTIAL SURGEON

If I have faltered more or less In my great task of happiness; If I have moved among my race And shown no glorious morning face; If beams from happy human eyes Have moved me not; if morning skies, Books, and my food, and summer rain Knocked on my sullen heart in vain:

— Lord, thy most pointed pleasure take And stab my spirit broad awake; Or, Lord, if too obdurate I, Choose thou, before that spirit die, A piercing pain, a killing sin, And to my dead heart run them in!

XXIII OUR LADY OF THE SNOWS

Out of the sun, out of the blast, Out of the world, alone I passed Across the moor and through the wood To where the monastery stood. There neither lute nor breathing fife, Nor rumour of the world of life, Nor confidences low and dear, Shall strike the meditative ear. Aloof, unhelpful, and unkind, The prisoners of the iron mind, Where nothing speaks except the hell The unfraternal brothers dwell.

Poor passionate men, still clothed afresh

With agonising folds of flesh;

Whom the clear eyes solicit still

To some bold output of the will,

While fairy Fancy far before

And musing Memory-Hold-the-door

Now to heroic death invite

And now uncurtain fresh delight:

O, little boots it thus to dwell

On the remote unneighboured hill!

O to be up and doing, O Unfearing and unshamed to go In all the uproar and the press About my human business! My undissuaded heart I hear Whisper courage in my ear. With voiceless calls, the ancient earth Summons me to a daily birth.

Thou, O my love, ye, O my friends— The gist of life, the end of ends— To laugh, to love, to live, to die, Ye call me by the ear and eye!

Forth from the casemate, on the plain Where honour has the world to gain, Pour forth and bravely do your part, O knights of the unshielded heart! Forth and forever forward! — out From prudent turret and redoubt, And in the mellay charge amain, To fall but yet to rise again! Captive? ah, still, to honour bright, A captive soldier of the right! Or free and fighting, good with ill? Unconquering but unconquered still!

And ye, O brethren, what if God, When from Heav'n's top he spies abroad,

And sees on this tormented stage The noble war of mankind rage: What if his vivifying eye, O monks, should pass your corner by? For still the Lord is Lord of might; In deeds, in deeds, he takes delight; The plough, the spear, the laden barks, The field, the founded city, marks; He marks the smiler of the streets, The singer upon garden seats; He sees the climber in the rocks; To him, the shepherd folds his flocks. For those he loves that underprop With daily virtues Heaven's top, And bear the falling sky with ease, Unfrowning caryatides. Those he approves that ply the trade, That rock the child, that wed the maid, That with weak virtues,

weaker hands,

Sow gladness on the peopled lands, And still with laughter, song and shout, Spin the great wheel of earth about.

But ye? — O ye who linger still Here in your fortress on the hill, With placid face, with tranquil breath, The unsought volunteers of death, Our cheerful General on high With careless looks may pass you by.

Not yet, my soul, these friendly fields desert, Where thou with grass, and rivers, and the breeze, And the bright face of day, thy dalliance hadst; Where to thine ear first sang the enraptured birds; Where love and thou that lasting bargain made. The ship rides trimmed, and from the eternal shore Thou hearest airy voices; but not yet Depart, my soul, not yet awhile depart.

Freedom is far, rest far. Thou art with life Too closely woven, nerve with nerve intwined; Service still craving service, love for love, Love for dear love, still suppliant with tears.

Alas, not yet thy human task is done!

A bond at birth is forged; a debt doth lie

Immortal on mortality. It grows —

By vast rebound it grows, unceasing growth;

Gift upon gift, alms upon alms, upreared,

From man, from God, from nature, till the soul

At that so huge indulgence stands amazed.

Leave not, my soul, the unfoughten field, nor leave Thy debts dishonoured, nor thy place desert Without due service rendered. For thy life, Up, spirit, and defend that fort of clay, Thy body, now beleaguered; whether soon Or late she fall; whether to-day thy friends Bewail thee dead, or, after years, a man Grown old in honour and the friend of peace. Contend, my soul, for moments and for hours; Each is with service pregnant; each reclaimed Is as a kingdom conquered, where to reign.

As when a captain rallies to the fight
His scattered legions, and beats ruin back,
He, on the field, encamps, well pleased in mind.
Yet surely him shall fortune overtake,
Him smite in turn, headlong his ensigns drive;
And" that dear land, now safe, to-morrow fall.
But he, unthinking, in the present good
Solely delights, and all the camps rejoice.

It is not yours, O mother, to complain,
Not, mother, yours to weep,
Though nevermore your son again
Shall to your bosom creep,
Though nevermore again you watch your baby sleep.
Though in the greener paths of earth,
Mother and child, no more
We wander; and no more the birth
Of me whom once you bore,
Seems still the brave reward that once it seemed of yore;

Though as all passes, day and night, The seasons and the years, From you, O mother, this

delight,

This also disappears —

Some profit yet survives of all your pangs and tears.

The child, the seed, the grain of corn,

The acorn on the hill,

Each for some separate end is born

In season fit, and still

Each must in strength arise to work the almighty will.

So from the hearth the children flee,

By that almighty hand

Austerely led; so one by sea

Goes forth, and one by land;

Nor aught of all man's sons escapes from that command.

So from the sally each obeys

The unseen almighty nod;

So till the ending all their ways

Blindfolded loth have trod:

Nor knew their task at all, but were the tools of God.

And as the fervent smith of yore

Beat out the glowing blade,

Nor wielded in the front of war

The weapons that he made,

But in the tower at home still plied his ringing trade;

So like a sword the son shall roam

On nobler missions sent;

And as the smith remained at home

In peaceful turret pent,

So sits the while at home the mother well content.

XXVI THE SICK CHILD

Child. O mother, lay your hand on my brow! O mother, mother, where am I now? Why is the room so gaunt and great? Why am I lying awake so late?

Mother. Fear not at all: the night is still.

Nothing is here that means you ill — Nothing but lamps the whole town through, And never a child awake but you.

Child. Mother, mother, speak low in my ear,

Some of the things are so great and near,

Some are so small and far away, I have a fear that I cannot say. What have I done, and what do I fear, And why are you crying, mother dear?

Mother. Out in the city, sounds begin

Thank the kind God, the carts come in! An hour or two more and God is so kind, The day shall be blue in the window-blind, Then shall my child go sweetly asleep, And dream of the birds and the hills of sheep.

XXVII IN MEMORIAM F. A. S.

Yet, O stricken heart, remember, O remember How of human days he lived the better part.

April came to bloom and never dim December Breathed its killing chills upon the head or

heart.

Doomed to know not Winter, only Spring, a being Trod the flowery April blithely for a while,

Took his fill of music, joy of thought and seeing, Came and stayed and went, nor ever ceased to smile.

Came and stayed and went, and now when all is finished, You alone have crossed the melancholy stream,

Yours the pang, but his, O his, the undiminished Undecaying gladness, undeparted dream.

All that life contains of torture, toil, and treason, Shame, dishonour, death, to him were but a name.

Here, a boy, he dwelt through all the singing season And ere the day of sorrow departed as he came.

Davos. 188 1.

XXVIII TO MY FATHER

Peace and her huge invasion to these shores Puts daily home; innumerable sails Dawn on the far horizon and draw near; Innumerable loves, uncounted hopes To our wild coasts, not darkling now, approach: Not now obscure, since thou and thine are there, And bright on the lone isle, the foundered reef, The long, resounding foreland, Pharos stands.

These are thy works, O father, these thy crown j Whether on high the air be pure, they shine Along the yellowing sunset, and all night Among the unnumbered stars of God they shine;

Or whether fogs arise and far and wide The low sea-level drown — each finds a tongue And all night long the tolling bell resounds: So shine, so toll, till night be overpast, Till the stars vanish, till the sun return, And in the haven rides the fleet secure.

In the first hour, the seaman in his skiff

Moves through the unmoving bay, to where the town

Its earliest smoke into the air upbreathes

And the rough hazels climb along the beach.

To the tugg'd oar the distant echo speaks.

The ship lies resting, where by reef and roost

Thou and thy lights have led her like a child.

This hast thou done, and I — can I be base?

I must arise, O father, and to port

Some lost, complaining seaman pilot home.

XXIX IN THE STATES

With half a heart I wander here

As from an age gone by A brother — yet though young in years,

An elder brother, I.

You speak another tongue than mine, Though both were English born.

I towards the night of time decline, You mount into the morn.

Youth shall grow great and strong and free,

But age must still decay: To-morrow for the States —for me,

England and Yesterday.

San Francisco.

A PORTRAIT

I am a kind of farthing dip,

Unfriendly to the nose and eyes;

A blue-behinded ape, I skip Upon the trees of Paradise.

At mankind's feast, I take my place In solemn, sanctimonious state,

And have the air of saying grace While I defile the dinner plate.

I am " the smiler with the knife," The battener upon garbage, I —

Dear Heaven, with such a rancid life, Were it not better far to die?

Yet still, about the human pale, I love to scamper, love to race,

To swing by my irreverent tail All over the most holy place;

And when at length, some golden day, The unfailing sportsman, aiming at,

Shall bag, me — all the world shall say: Thank God, a?id there's an end of that I

Sing clearlier, Muse, or evermore be still, Sing truer or no longer sing! No more the voice of melancholy Jacques To wake a weeping echo in the hill; But as the boy, the pirate of the spring, From the green elm a living linnet takes, One natural verse recapture—then be still.

XXXII A CAMP 1

The bed was made, the room was fit, By punctual eve the stars were lit; The air was still, the water ran, No need was there for maid or man, When we put up, my ass and I, At God's green caravanserai.

XXXIII THE COUNTRY OF THE CAMISARDS 1

We travelled in the print of olden wars, Yet all the land was green, And love we found, and peace, Where fire and war had been.

They pass and smile, the children of the sword No more the sword they wield; And O, how deep the corn Along the battlefield!

XXXIV SKERRYVORE

For love of lovely words, and for the sake Of those, my kinsmen and my countrymen, Who early and late in the windy ocean toiled To plant a star for seamen, where was then The surfy haunt of seals and cormorants: I, on the lintel of this cot, inscribe The name of a strong tower.

XXXV SKERRYVORE: The Parallel

Here all is sunny, and when the truant gull

Skims the green level of the lawn, his wing

Dispetals roses; here the house is framed

Of kneaded brick and the plumed mountain pine,

Such clay as artists fashion and such wood

As the tree-climbing urchin breaks. But there

Eternal granite hewn from the living isle

And dowelled with brute iron, rears a tower

That from its wet foundation to its crown

Of glittering glass, stands, in the sweep of winds,

Immovable, immortal, eminent.

My house, I say. But hark to the sunny doves That make my roof the arena of their loves, That gyre about the gable all day long And fill the chimneys with their murmurous song Our house, they say; and mine, the cat declares And spreads his golden fleece upon the chairs; And mine the dog, and rises stiff with wrath If any alien foot profane the path. So, too, the buck that trimmed my terraces, Our whilome gardener, called the garden his; Who now, deposed, surveys my plain abode And his late kingdom, only from the road.

My body which my dungeon is, And yet my parks and palaces: —

Which is so great that there I go All the day long to and fro, And when the night begins to fall Throw down my bed and sleep, while all The building hums with wakefulness — Even as a child of savages When evening takes her on her way, (She having roamed a summer's day Along the mountain-sides and scalp) Sleeps in an antre of that alp:

Which is so broad and high that there, As in the topless fields of air, My fancy soars like to a kite

And faints in the blue infinite: —

Which is so strong, my strongest throes And the rough world's besieging blows Not break it, and so weak withal, Death ebbs and flows in its loose wall As the green sea in fishers' nets, And tops its topmost parapets: — Which is so wholly mine that I Can wield its whole artillery, And mine so little, that my soul Dwells in perpetual control, And I but think and speak and do As my dead fathers move me to: —

If this born body of my bones The beggared soul so barely owns, What money passed from hand to hand, What creeping custom of the land, What deed of author or assign, Can make a house a thing of mine?

XXXVIII

Say not of me that weakly I declined The labours of my sires, and fled the sea, The towers we founded and the lamps we lit, To play at home with paper like a child. But rather say: In the afternoon of time A strenuous family dusted from its hands The sand of granite, and beholding far Along the sounding coast its pyramids And tall memorials catch the dying sun, Smiled well content, and to this childish task Around the fire addressed its evening hours.

BOOK 11.—/^ Scots

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TABLE OF COMMON SCOTTISH VOWEL SOUNDS
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. > = open A as in rare. ae ai "a' ^ au > = AW as in law. aw)

ea = open E as in mere, but this with exceptions, as heather = heather, wean = wain, lear

=lair.

ee \'7d ei > = open E as in mere. ie)

oa = open O as in more.

ou = doubled O as in poor.

ow = OW as in bower.

u = doubled O as in poor.

ui or ii before R = (say roughly) open A as in rare.

ui or ii before any other consonant = (say roughly) close I as in grin.

y = open I as in kite.

i = pretty nearly what you please, much as in English. Heaven guide the reader through that labyrinth! But in Scots it dodges usually from the short I, as in grin, to the open E, as in mere. Find and blind, I may remark, are pronounced to rhyme with the preterite of grin.

THE MAKER TO POSTERITY

Far 'yont amang the years to be When a' we think, an' a' we see, An' a' we luve, 's been dung ajee

By time's rouch shouther, An' what was richt and wrang for me

Lies mangled throu'ther,

It's possible — it's hardly mair — That some ane, ripin' after lear — Some auld professor or young heir,

If still there's either — May find an' read me, an' be sair Perplexed, puir brither!

" What tongue does your auld bookie speak?"

He'll spier; an' I, his mou to steik: "No bein' fit to write in Greeks I wrote in Lalla?i, Dear to my heart as the peat reek, Auld as Tantallon.

"Few spak it than, an' noo there's nane. My puir auld sangs lie a' their lane, Their sense, that aince was braw an' plain,

Tint a'thegether, Like runes upon a stand in' stane

Amang the heather.

"But think not you the brae to speel; You, tae, maun chow the bitter peel; For a' your tear, for a' your skeel,

Ye're na7ie sae lucky; An' things are mebbe waur than weel For you, my buckie.

"The hale concern (baith hens an 1 eggs, Baith books an' writers, stars an' clegs) Noo stackers upon lowsent legs

An' wears awa'y The tack o' mankind, near the dregs,

Rins unco law.

"Your book, that in some braw new tongue, Ye wrote or prentit, preached or sung, Will still be just a bairn, an' you?ig

In fame an' years, Whan the hale planet's guts are dung About your ears;

" An' you, sair gruppin' to a spar Or whammled wP some bleezifi' star, Cryin' to ken whaur deilye are,

Hame, France, or Flanders — Whang sindry like a railway car

An'fliein danders"

ILLE TERRARUM

Frae nirly, nippin', Eas'lan' breeze, Frae Norlan' snaw, an' haar o' seas, Weel happit in your gairden trees,

A bonny bit, Atween the muckle Pentland's knees,

Secure ye sit.

Beeches an' aiks entwine their theek, An' firs, a stench, auld-farrant clique. A' simmer day, your chimleys reek,

Couthy and bien; An' here an' there your windies keek

Amang the green.

A pickle plats an* paths an' posies, A wheen auld gillyflowers an' roses: A ring o' wa's the hale encloses

Frae sheep or men; An' there the auld housie beeks an' doses,

A' by her lane.

The gairdner crooks his weary back

A' day in the pitaty-track,

Or mebbe stops awhile to crack

Wi' Jane the cook, Or at some buss, worm-eaten-black,

To gie a look.

Frae the high hills the curlew ca's; The sheep gang baaing by the wa's; Or whiles a clan o' roosty craws

Cangle thegether; The wild bees seek the gairden raws,

Weariet wi' heather.

Or in the gloamin' douce an' gray The sweet-throat mavis tunes her lay; The herd comes linkin' doun the brae;

An' by degrees The muckle siller miine maks way

Amang the trees.

Here aft hae I, wi' sober heart, For meditation sat apairt, When orra loves or kittle art

Perplexed my mind; Here socht a balm for ilka smart

O' humankind.

Here aft, weel neukit by my lane, Wi' Horace, or perhaps Montaigne, The mornin' hours hae come an' gane

Abiine my heid— I wadnae gi'en a chucky-stane

For a' I'd read.

But noo the auld city, street by street, An' winter fu' o' snaw an' sleet, Awhile shut in my gangrel feet

An' goavin' mettle; Noo is the soopit ingle sweet,

An' liltin' kettle.

An' noo the winter winds complain; Cauld lies the glaur in ilka lane; On draigled hizzie, tautit wean

An' drucken lads, In the mirk nicht, the winter rain

Dribbles an' blads.

Whan bugles frae the Castle rock, An' beaten drums wi' dowie shock, Wauken, at cauld-rife sax o'clock,

My chitterin' frame, I mind me on the kintry cock,

The kintry hame.

I mind me on yon bonny bield; An' Fancy traivels far afield To gaither a' that gairdens yield

O' sun an' Simmer: To hearten up a dowie chield,

Fancy's the limmer!

When aince Aprile has fairly come, An' birds may bigg in winter's lum, An' pleisure's spreid for a' and some

O' whatna state, Love, wi' her auld recruitin' drum,

Than taks the gate

The heart plays dunt wi' main an' micht; The lasses' een are a' sae bricht, Their dresses are sae braw an' ticht,

The bonny birdies! — Puir winter virtue at the sicht

Gangs heels ower hurdies.

An' aye as love frae land to land Tirls the drum wi' eident hand, A' men collect at her command,

Toun-bred or land'art, An' follow in a denty band

Her gaucy standart.

An' I, wha sang o' rain an' snaw, An' weary winter weel awa', Noo busk me in a jacket braw,

An' tak my place I' the ram-stam, harum-scarum raw,

Wi* smilin' face.

IV A MILE AN' A BITTOCK

A mile an' a bittock, a mile or twa, Abiine the burn, ayont the law, Davie an' Donal' an'

Cherlie an' a', An' the miine was shinin' clearly!

Ane went hame wi' the ither, an' then The ither went hame wi' the ither twa men, An* baith wad return him the service again. An' the miine was shinin' clearly!

The clocks were chappin' in house an' ha', Eleeven, twal an' ane an' twa;

An' the guidman's face was turnt to the wa', An' the miine was shinin' clearly!

A wind got up frae affa the sea, It blew the stars as dear's could be, It blew in the een of a' o' the three, An' the miine was shinin' clearly!

Noo, Davie was first to get sleep in his head, "The best o' frien's maun twine," he said; "I'm weariet, an' here I'm awa' to my bed." An' the miine was shinin' clearly!

Twa o' them walkin' an' crackin' their lane, The mornin' licht cam gray an' plain, An' the birds they yammert on stick an' stane, An' the miine was shinin' clearly!

O years ayont, O years awa', My lads, ye'll mind whate'er befa'— My lads, ye'll mind on the bield o' the law, When the miine was shinin' clearly.

V A LOWDEN SABBATH MORN

The clinkum-clank o' Sabbath bells Noo to the hoastin' rookery swells, Noo faintin' laigh in shady dells,

Sounds far an' near, An' through the simmer kintry tells

Its tale o' cheer.

An' noo, to that melodious play, A' deidly awn the quiet sway — A' ken their solemn holiday,

Bestial an' human, The singin' Untie on the brae,

The restin' plou'man.

He, mair than a' the lave o' men, His week completit joys to ken; Half-dressed, he daunders out an' in,

Perplext wi' leisure; An' his raxt limbs he'll rax again

Wi' painfti' pleesure.

The steerin' mither Strang ant Noo shoos the bairnies but a bit; Noo cries them ben, their Sinday shiiit

To scart upon them, Or sweeties in their pouch to pit,

Wi' blessin's on them.

The lasses, clean frae tap to taes, Are busked in crunklin' underclaes; The gartened hose, the weel-filled stays,

The nakit shift, A' bleached on bonny greens for days,

An' white's the drift.

An' noo to face the kirkward mile: The guidman's hat o' dacent style, The blackit shoon, we noo maun fyle

As white's the miller: A waefii' peety tae, to spile

The warth o' siller.

Our Marg'et, aye sae keen to crack, Douce-stappin' in the stoury track, Her emeralt goun a' kiltit back

Frae snawy coats, White-ankled, leads the kirkward pack

Wi' Dauvit Groats.

A' thocht ahint, in runkled breeks, A' spiled wi' lyin' by for weeks, The guidman follows closs, an' cleiks

The sonsie missis; His sarious face at aince bespeaks

The day that this is.

And aye an' while we nearer draw To whaur the kirkton lies alaw, Mair neebours, comin' saft an' slaw

Frae here an' there, The thicker thrang the gate an' caw

The stour in air.

But hark! the bells frae nearer clang; To rowst the slaw, their sides they bang; An' see! black coats a'ready thrang

The green kirkyaird; And at the yett, the chestnuts spang

That brocht the laird.

The solemn elders at the plate

Stand drinkin' deep the pride o' state:

The practised hands as gash an' great

As Lords o' Session; The later named, a wee thing blate

In their expression.

The prentit stanes that mark the deid, Wi' lengthened lip, the sarious read; Syne wag a moraleesin' heid,

An' then an' there Their hirplin' practice an' their creed

Try hard to square.

It's here our Merren lang has lain,

A wee bewast the table-stane;

An' yon's the grave o' Sandy Blane;

An' further ower, The mither's brithers, dacent men!

Lie a' the fower.

Here the guidman sail bide awee To dwall amang the deid; to see Auld faces clear in fancy's e'e;

Belike to hear Auld voices fa'in saft an' slee

On fancy's ear.

Thus, on the day o' solemn things, The bell that in the steeple swings To fauld a scaittered faim'ly rings

Its walcome screed; An' just a wee thing nearer brings

The quick an' deid.

But noo the bell is ringin' in; To tak their places, folk begin; The minister himsel' will shiine

Be up the gate, Filled fu' wi' clavers about sin

An' man's estate.

The tunes are up — French, to be shure, The faithfu' French, an' twa-three mair; The auld prezentor, hoastin' sair,

Wales out the portions, An' yirks the tune into the air

Wi' queer contortions.

Follows the prayer, the readin' next, An' than the fisslin' for the text — The twa-three last to find it, vext

But kind o' proud; An' than the peppermints are raxed,

An' southernwood.

For noo's the time whan pows are seen Nid-noddin' like a mandareen; When tenty mithers stap a preen

In sleepin' weans; An' nearly half the parochine

Forget their pains.

There's just a waukrif twa or three: Thrawn commentautors sweer to 'gree, Weans glowrin' at the bumlin' bee

On win die-glasses, Or lads that tak a keek a-glee

At sonsie lasses.

Himsel', meanwhile, frae whaur he cocks An' bobs belaw the soundin'-box, The treesures of his words unlocks

Wi' prodigality, An' deals some unco dingin' knocks

To infidality.

Wi' sappy unction, hoo he burkes The hopes o' men that trust in works, Expounds the fau'ts o' ither kirks,

An' shaws the best o' them No muckle better than mere Turks,

When a's confessed o' them.

Bethankit! what a bonny creed!

What mair would ony Christian need?—

The braw words rumm'le ower his heid,

Nor steer the sleeper; And in their restin' graves, the deid

Sleep aye the deeper.

Note. —It may be guessed by some that I had a certain parish in my eye, and this makes it proper I should add a word of disclamation. In my time there have been two ministers in that parish. Of the first I have a special reason to speak well, even had there been any to think ill. The second I have often met in private and long (in the due phrase) "sat under" in his church, and neither here nor there have I heard an unkind or ugly word upon his lips. The preacher of the text had thus no original in that particular parish; but when I was a boy, he might have been observed in many others; he was then (like the schoolmaster) abroad; and by recent advices, it would seem he has not yet entirely disappeared.

VI THE SPAEWIFE

- O, I wad like to ken to the beggar-wife says I Why chops are guid to brander and nane sae guid to fry. An' siller, that's sae braw to keep, is brawer still to gi'e.
 - Its gey art easy spierirt, says the beggar-wife to me.
 - O, I wad like to ken to the beggar-wife says I —

Hoo a' things come to be whaur we find them when we try,

The lasses in their claes an' the fishes in the sea.

- Its gey art easy spierirt, says the beggar-wife to me.
- O, I wad like to ken to the beggar-wife says I —

Why lads are a* to sell an' lasses a' to buy;

An' naebody for dacency but barely twa or three.

- Its gey art easy spierirt, says the beggar-wife to me.
- O, I wad like to ken to the beggar-wife says I —

Gin death's as shiire to men as killin' is to kye,

Why God has filled the yearth sae fu' o' tasty things to pree.

- Its gey an' easy spieriti\ says the beggar-wife to me.
- O, I wad like to ken to the beggar-wife says I The reason o' the cause an' the wherefore o' the why, Wi' mony anither riddle brings the tear into my e'e.
 - Its gey an' easy spierin\ says the beggar-wife to me.

VII THE BLAST—1875

It's rainin\ Weet's the gairden sod, Weet the lang roads whaur gangrels plod A maist

unceevil thing o' God

In mid July — If ye'll just curse the sneckdraw, dod!

An' sae wull I!

He's a braw place in Heev'n, ye ken, An' lea's us puir, forjaskit men Clamjamfried in the but and ben

He ca's the earth — A wee bit inconvenient den

No muckle worth;

THE BLAST—>i-3'/5 j j • ■, ;\.•

An' whiles, at orra times, keeks out, Sees what puir mankind are about; An' if He can, I've little doubt,

Upsets their plans; He hates a' mankind, brainch and root,

An a' that's man's.

An' whiles, whan they tak heart again, An' life i' the sun looks braw an' plain, Doun comes a jaw o' droukin' rain

Upon their honours — God sends a spate outower the plain,

Or mebbe thun'ers.

Lord safe us, life's an unco thing! Simmer an' Winter, Yule an' Sprin, The damned, dour-heartit seasons bring

A feck o' trouble. I wadnae try't to be a king —

No, nor for double.

But since we're in it, willy-nilly,

We maun be watchfii', wise an' skilly,

An' no mind ony ither billy,

Lassie nor God. But drink — that's my best counsel till 'e:

Sae tak the nod.

VIII THE COUNTERBLAST—1886

My bonny man, the warld, it's true, Was made for neither me nor you; It's just a place to warstle through,

As Job confessed o't; And aye the best that we'll can do

Is mak the best o't.

There's rowth o' wrang, I'm free to say The simmer brunt, the winter blae, The face of earth a' fyled wi' clay

An' dour wi' chuckies, An' life a rough an' land'art play

For country buckies.

An' food's anither name for clart; An' beasts an' brambles bite an' scart; An' what would we be like, my heart!

If bared o' claethin'? — Aweel, I cannae mend your cart:

It's that or naethin'.

A feck o' folk frae first to last

Have through this queer experience passed;

Twa-three, I ken, just damn an' blast

The hale transaction; But twa-three ithers, east an' wast,

Fand satisfaction.

Whaur braid the briery muirs expand,

A waefii' an' a weary land,

The bumblebees, a gowden band,

Are blithely hingin'; An' there the canty wanderer fand

The laverock singin'.

Trout in the burn grow great as herr'n; The simple sheep can find their fair'n' j The wind blaws clean about the cairn

Wi' caller air; The muircock an' the barefit bairn

Are happy there.

Sic-like the howes o' life to some:

Green loans whaur they ne'er fash their thumb,

But mark the muckle winds that come,

Soopin' an' cool, Or hear the powrin' burnie drum

In the shilfa's pool.

The evil wi' the guid they tak; They ca' a gray thing gray, no black; To a steigh brae, a stubborn back

Addressin' daily; An' up the rude, unbieldy track

O' life, gang gaily.

What you would like's a palace ha', Or Sinday parlour dink an' braw Wi' a' things ordered in a raw-By denty leddies. Weel, than, ye cannae hae't: that's a' That to be said is.

An' since at life ye've taen the grue, An' winnae blithely hirsle through, Ye've fund the very thing to do —

That's to drink speerit; An' shiine we'll hear the last o' you —

An' blithe to hear it!

The shoon ye coft, the life ye lead, Ithers will heir when aince ye're deid; They'll heir your tasteless bite o' breid,

An' find it sappy; They'll to your dulefii' house succeed,

An' there be happy.

As whan a glum an' fractious wean Has sat an' sullened by his lane Till, wi' a rowstin' skelp, he's taen

An' shoo'd to bed — The ither bairns a' fa' to play'n',

As gleg's a gled.

IX THE COUNTERBLAST IRONICAL

It's strange that God should fash to frame

The yearth and lift sae hie, An' clean forget to explain the same

To a gentleman like me.

They gutsy, donnered ither folk,

Their weird they weel may dree;

But why present a pig in a poke To a gentleman like me?

They ither folk their parritch eat

An' sup their sugared tea; But the mind is no to be wyled wi' meat

Wi' a gentleman like me.

They ither folk, they court their joes

At gloamin' on the lea; But they're made of a commoner clay, I suppose,

Than a gentleman like me.

They ither folk, for richt or wrang,

They suffer, bleed, or dee; But a' thir things are an emp'y sang

To a gentleman like me.

It's a different thing that I demand,

Tho' humble as can be — A statement fair in my Maker's hand

To a gentleman like me:

A clear account writ fair an' broad,

An' a plain apologie; Or the deevil a ceevil word to God

From a gentleman like me.

THEIR LAUREATE TO AN ACADEMY CLASS DINNER CLUB

Dear Thamson class, whaure'er I gang It aye comes ower me wi' a spang: "Lordsake! they Thamson lads — (deilhang Or else Lord mend them!) — An 1 that wanchancy annual sang I ne^er can send them / "

Straucht, at the name, a trusty tyke, My conscience girrs ahint the dyke; Straucht on my hinderlands I fyke

To find a rhyme t' ye; Pleased — although mebbe no pleased-like —

To gie my time t' ye.

"Weel" an' says you, wi' heavin' breist, "Saefar, sae guid> but what's the neist? Yearly we gaither to the feast,

A' hopefi? men — Yearly we skelloch 'Hang the beast — Nae sang again /' "

My lads, an' what am I to say? Ye shurely ken the Muse's way: Yestreen, as gleg's a tyke — the day,

Thrawn like a cuddy: Her conduc', that to her's a play,

Deith to a body.

Aft whan I sat an' made my mane, Aft whan I laboured burd-alane, Fishin' for rhymes an' findin' nane,

Or nane were fit for ye — Ye judged me cauld's a chucky stane —

No car'n' a bit for ye!

UNDERWOODS

But saw ye ne'er some pingein' bairn

As weak as a pitaty-par'n' —

Less iised wi' guidin' horse-shoe aim

Than steerin' crowdie — Packed aff his lane, by moss an* cairn,

To ca' the howdie.

Wae's me, for the puir callant than! He wambles like a poke o' bran, An' the lowse rein, as hard's he can,

Pu's, trem'lin' handit; Till, blaff! upon his hinderlan'

Behauld him landit.

Sic-like — I awn the weary fac' — Whan on my muse the gate I tak, An' see her gleed e'e raxin' back

To keek ahint her j — To me, the brig o' Heev'n gangs black

As blackest winter.

"Lordsake! we're off" thinks I, "but whaur? On what abhorred an' whinny scaur, Or whammled in what sea o' glaur,

Will she desert me? An' will she just disgrace? or waur —

Will she no hurt me?"

Kittle the quaere! But at least

The day I've backed the fashious beast,

While she, wi' mony a spang an* reist,

Flang heels ower bonnet; An' a' triumphant — for your feast,

Hae! there's your sonnet!

XI EMBRO HIE KIRK

The Lord Himsel' in former days Waled out the proper tunes for praise An' named the proper kind o' claes

For folk to preach in: Preceese and in the chief o' ways

Important teachin'.

He ordered a' things late and air'; He ordered folk to stand at prayer. (Although I cannae just mind where

He gave the warnin'.) An' pit pomatum on their hair

On Sabbath mornin'.

The hale o' life by His commands Was ordered to a body's hands; But see! this corpus juris stands

By a' forgotten; An' God's religion in a' lands

Is deid an' rotten.

While thus the lave o' mankind's lost, O' Scotland still God maks His boast—Puir Scotland, on whase barren coast

A score or twa Auld wives wi' mutches an' a hoast

Still keep His law.

In Scotland, a wheen canty, plain, Douce, kintry-leevin' folk retain The Truth — or did so aince — alane

Of a' men leevin'; An' noo just twa o' them remain —

Just Begg an' Niven.

For noo, unfaithfu' to the Lord Auld Scotland joins the rebel horde; Her human hymn-books on the board

She noo displays: An' Embro Hie Kirk's been restored

In popish ways.

O punctum temporis for action To a' o' the reformin' faction, If yet, by ony act or paction, Thocht, word, or sermon, This dark an' damnable transaction

Micht yet determine!

For see — as Doctor Begg explains — Hoo easy 't's dime! a pickle weans, Wha in the Hie Street gaither stanes

By his instruction, The uncovenantit, pentit panes

Ding to destruction.

Up, Niven, or ower late — an' dash Laigh in the glaur that carnal hash; Let spires and pews wi' gran' stramash

Thegether fa'; The rumlin' kist o' whustles smash

In pieces sma'.

Noo choose ye out a waie hammer; About the knottit buttress clam'er; Alang the steep roof stoyt an' stammer,

A gate mis-chancy; On the auP spire, the bells' hie cha'mer, "Dance your bit dancie.

Ding, devel, dunt, destroy, an' ruin, Wi' carnal stanes the square bestrewin', Till your loud chaps frae Kyle to Fruin,

Frae Hell to Heeven, Tell the guid wark that baith are doin'-

Baith Begg an' Niven.

THE SCOTSMAN'S RETURN FROM ABROAD

In a letter from Mr. Thomson to Mr. Johnstone.

In mony a foreign pairt I've been,
An' mony an unco ferlie seen,
Since, Mr. Johnstone, you and I
Last walkit upon Cocklerye.
Wi' gleg, observant een, I pass't
By sea an' land, through East an' Wast,
And still in ilka age an' station
Saw naething but abomination.
In thir unco ven an tit lands
The gangrel Scot uplifts his hands

THE SCOTSMAN'S RETURN FROM ABROAD 119

At lack of a' sectarian fiish'n, An' cauld religious destitution. He rins, puir man, frae place to place, Tries a' their graceless means o' grace, Preacher on preacher, kirk on kirk— This yin a stot an' thon a stirk— A bletherin' clan, no warth a preen, As bad as Smith of Aiberdeen!

At last, across the weary faem, Frae far, outlandish pairts I came. On ilka side o' me I fand Fresh tokens o' my native land. Wi' whatna joy I hailed them a'— The hilltaps standin' raw by raw, The public house, the Hielan' birks, And a' the bonny U. P. kirks! But maistly thee, the bluid o' Scots, Frae Maidenkirk to John o' Grots,

The king o' drinks, as I conceive it, Talisker, Isla, or Glenlivet!

For after years wi' a pockmantie

Frae Zanzibar to Alicante,

In mony a fash and sair affliction

I gie't as my sincere conviction —

Of a' their foreign tricks an' pliskies,

I maist abominate their whiskies.

Nae doot, themsels, they ken it weel,

An' wi' a hash o' leemon peel,

And ice an' siccan filth, they ettle

The stawsome kind o' goo to settle;

Sic wersh apothecary's broos wi'

As Scotsmen scorn to fyle their moo's wi'

An', man, I was a blithe hame-comer Whan first I syndit out my rummer. Ye should hae seen me then, wi' care The less important pairts prepare;

THE SCOTSMAN'S RETURN FROM ABROAD 121

Syne, weel contentit wi' it a', Pour in the speerits wi' a jaw! I didnae drink, I didnae speak,— I only snowkit up the reek. I was sae pleased therin to paidle, I sat an' plowtered wi' my ladle.

An' blithe was I, the morrow's morn, To daunder through the stookit corn, And after a' my strange mishanters, Sit doun amang my ain dissenters. An', man, it was a joy to me The pu'pit an' the pews to see, The pennies dirlin' in the plate, The elders lookin' on in state; An' 'mang the first, as it befell, Wha should I see, sir, but yoursel'!

I was, and I will no deny it, At the first gliff a hantle tryit

To see yoursel' in sic a station —

It seemed a doubtfu' dispensation.

The feelin' was a mere digression;

For shiine I understood the session,

An' mindin' Aiken an' M'Neil,

I wondered they had dime sae weel.

I saw I had mysel' to blame;

For had I but remained at hame,

Aiblins — though no ava' deservin' 't —

They micht hae named your humble servant.

The kirk was filled, the door was steeked; Up to the pu'pit ance I keeked; I was mair pleased than I can tell — It was the minister himsel'! Proud, proud was I to see his face, After sae lang awa' frae grace. Pleased as I was, I'm no denyin' Some maitters were not edifyin';

THE SCOTSMAN'S RETURN FROM ABROAD 123

For first I fand — an' here was news! —

Mere hymn-books cockin' in the pews —

A humanised abomination,

Unfit for ony congregation.

Syne, while I still was on the tenter,

I scunnered at the new prezentor;

I thocht him gesterhV an' cauld —

A sair declension frae the auld.

Syne, as though a' the faith was wreckit,

The prayer was not what I'd exspeckit.

Himsel', as it appeared to me,

Was no the man he used to be.

•

But just as I was growin' vext He waled a maist judeecious text, An', launchin' into his prelections, Swoopt, wi' a skirl, on a' defections.

O what a gale was on my speerit To hear the p'ints o' doctrine clearit,

And a' the horrors o' damnation Set furth wi' faithfu' ministration! Nae shauchlin' testimony here — We were a' damned, an' that was clear. I owned, wi' gratitude an' wonder, He was a pleisure to sit under.

Late in the nicht in bed I lay, The winds were at their weary play, An' tirlin' wa's an' skirlin' wae

Through Heev'n they battered; On-ding o' hail, on-blaff o' spray,

The tempest blattered.

The masoned house it dinled through; It dung the ship, it cowped the coo'; The rankit aiks it overthrew,

Had braved a' weathers; The Strang sea-gleds it took an' blew

Awa' like feathers.

The thrawes o' fear on a' were shed, An' the hair rose, an' slumber fled, An' lichts were lit an' prayers were said

Through a' the kintry; An' the cauld terror clum in bed

Wi' a' an' sindry.

To hear in the pit-mirk on hie

The brangled collieshangie flie,

The war?, they thocht, wi' land an' sea,

ItseP wad cowpit; An' for auld aim, the smashed debris

By God be rowpit.

Meanwhile frae far Aldeboran, To folks wi' talescopes in han', O' ships that cowpit, winds that ran,

Nae sign was seen, But the wee warP in sunshine span

As bricht's a preen.

I, tae, by God's especial grace, Dwall denty in a bieldy place, Wi' hosened feet, wi' shaven face,

Wi' dacent mainners: A grand example to the race

O' tautit sinners!

The wind may blaw, the heathen rage, The deil may start on the rampage; — The sick in bed, the thief in cage—

What's a' to me? Cosh in my house, a sober sage,

I sit an' see.

An' whiles the bluid spangs to my bree, To lie sae saft, to live sae free, While better men maun do an' die

In unco places. ;< Whaur's God? " I cry, an' " Whae is me

To hae sic graces?"

I mind the fecht the sailors keep, But fire or can'le, rest or sleep, In darkness an' the muckle deep;

An' mind beside The herd that on the hills o' sheep

Has wandered wide.

I mind me on the hoastin' weans — The penny joes on causey stanes — The auld folk wi' the crazy banes,

Baith auld an' puir, That aye maun thole the winds an' rains,

An' labour sair.

An' whiles I'm kind o' pleased a blink, An' kind o' fleyed forby, to think, For a' my rowth o' meat an' drink

An* waste o' crumb, I'll mebbe have to thole wi' skink

In Kingdom Come.

For God whan jowes the Judgment bell, Wi' His ain Hand, His Leevin' SeP, Sail ryve the guid (as Prophets tell)

Frae them that had it; And in the reamin' pat o' Hell,

The rich be scaddit.

O Lord, if this indeed be sae, Let daw that sair an' happy day! Again' the warl', grawn auld an' gray,

Up wi' your aixe! An' let the puir enjoy their play—

I'll thole my paiks.

XIV MY CONSCIENCE!

Of a' the ills that flesh can fear, The loss o' frien's, the lack o' gear, A yowlin' tyke, a glandered mear,

A lassie's nonsense — There's just ae thing I cannae bear,

An' that's my conscience.

Whan day (an' a' excuse) has gane, An' wark is dime, and duty's plain, An' to my chalmer a' my lane

I creep apairt, My conscience! hoo the yammerin' pain

Stends to my heart!

A' day wi' various ends in view The hairsts o' time I had to pu', An' made a hash wad staw

a soo,

Let be a man! — My conscience! whan my han's were fu',

Whaur were ye then?

An' there were a' the lures o' life, There pleesure skirlin' on the fife, There anger, wi' the hotchin' knife

Ground shairp in Hell — My conscience!— you that's like a wife!—

Whaur was yourseP?

I ken it fine: just waitin' here,

To gar the evil waur appear,

To clart the guid, confuse the clear,

Misca' the great, My conscience! an' to raise a steer

Whan a's ower late.

Sic-like, some tyke grawn auld and blind, Whan thieves brok' through the gear to p'ind, Has lain his dozened length an' grinned

At the disaster; An' the morn's mornin', wud's the wind,

Yokes on his master.

XV TO DOCTOR JOHN BROWN

(Whan the dear doctor, dear to a\ Was still amang us here belaw, I set my pipes his praise to blaw

WV a' my speerit; But nooy Dear Doctor I he's awa\

An? ne'er can hear it.)

By Lyne and Tyne, by Thames and Tees,

By a' the various river-Dee's,

In Mars and Manors 'yont the seas

Or here at hame, Whaure'er there's kindly folk to please,

They ken your name.

They ken your name, they ken your tyke, They ken the honey from your byke; But mebbe after a' your fyke,

(The truth to tell) It's just your honest Rab they like,

An' no yoursel'.

As at the gowff, some canny play'r Should tee a common ba' wi' care — Should flourish and deleever fair

His souple shintie — An' the ba' rise into the air,

A leevin' lintie:

Sae in the game we writers play, There comes to some a bonny day, When a dear ferlie shall repay

Their years o' strife, An' like you Rab, their things o' clay,

Spreid wings o' life.

Ye scarce deserved it, I'm afraid — You that had never learned the trade, But just some idle mornin' strayed

Into the schule, An' picked the fiddle up an' played

Like Neil himseP.

Your e'e was gleg, your ringers dink; Ye didnae fash yoursel' to think, But wove, as fast as puss can link,

Your denty wab: — Ye stapped your pen into the ink,

An' there was Rab!

Sinsyne, whaure'er your fortune lay By dowie den, by canty brae, Simmer an' winter, nicht an' day,

Rab was aye wi' ye; An' a' the folk on a' the way

Were blithe to see ye.

O sir, the gods are kind indeed, An' hauld ye for an honoured heid, That for a wee bit clarkit screed

Sae weel reward ye, An' lend — puir Rabbie bein' deid —

His ghaist to guard ye.

For though, whaure'er yourseP may be, We've just to turn an' glisk a wee, An' Rab at heel we're shiire to see

11. 1

Wi' gladsome caper: The bogle of a bogle, he —

A ghaist o' paper!

And as the auld-farrand hero sees

In Hell a bogle Hercules,

Pit there the lesser deid to please,

While he himsel' Dwalls wi' the muckle gods at ease

Far raised frae hell:

Sae the true Rabbie far has gane

On kindlier business o' his ain

Wi* aulder frien's; an' his breist-bane

An' stumpie tailie, He birstles at a new hearth stane

By James and Ailie.

It's an owercome sooth for age an' youth

And it brooks wi' nae denial, That the dearest friends are the auldest friends

And the young are just on trial.

There's a rival bauld wi' young an' auld

And it's him that has bereft me; For the surest friends are the auldest friends

And the maist o' mines hae left me.

There are kind hearts still, for friends to fill And fools to take and break them:

But the nearest friends are the auldest friends And the grave's the place to seek them.



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